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Title : Cetacean Bycatch in Pelagic Longline Fisheries

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Abstract : The seriousness of cetacean bycatch by fisheries is gaining increasing public attention. Although the concern is mainly with net fisheries, other types of fishing gear also contribute to cetacean mortality. Longlining for large pelagic fish species is the most widespread fishery and has generally been regarded as benign toward cetaceans. In fact, most of the reported interactions between cetaceans and longline fisheries have consisted of depredation by cetaceans on the fish catch. Increased monitoring of longline fishing operations has demonstrated that cetacean bycatch occurs in both bottom (e.g. killer and sperm whales in Southern Oceans Patagonian toothfish and Alaskan sablefish fisheries) and pelagic (e.g. several small/medium size cetaceans in tuna and billfish fisheries in tropical and subtropical oceans) longlining. Data on cetacean interactions with pelagic longlines were collected by observers on board vessels of the Brazilian fleet and by researchers who examined cetaceans landed at fishing ports in Taiwan. Cetaceans were captured incidentally by either being hooked in the mouth or throat or entangled by lines. The documented bycatch included: killer and false killer whales, Risso's, common bottlenose, rough-toothed, spinner and striped dolphins. Furthermore, some Taiwanese longline fishermen hunted (usually opportunistically) small cetaceans with harpoon. The main harpooned species were pantropical spotted, spinner, common bottlenose and striped dolphins. Given the size of the fleet, the direct catch by the Taiwanese pelagic longline vessels may be considerable. The data from Brazilian and Taiwanese pelagic longline vessels constitute direct evidence that this method of fishing is not entirely benign, as is generally believed, and the scale of mortality from bycatch and direct hunting, combined, is cause for concern.